FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE

AUSTRALIAN PERMANENT MISSION
TO THE UN GENEVA

26 February 2026

By email: ohchr-tbs@un.org

Dear sir/madam,

Australia thanks the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) for the invitation to provide a submission to inform the report into the state of the human rights treaty body system, in particular on the implementation of UN General Assembly resolution *Strengthening and enhancing the effective functioning of the human rights treaty body system* (A/RES/68/268).

Australia is strongly committed to advancing human rights globally through our bilateral relationships, development assistance and partnerships with civil society, as well as our engagement in regional and multilateral fora, including the UN Human Rights Council (HRC). Already this year Australia has appeared before both the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Working Group of the HRC, and has reports to three different treaty bodies under preparation for submission this year.

The Secretary-General's report on the human rights treaty body system is welcome. Increasing push-back against human rights and global norms, and the UN's liquidity crisis, has placed unprecedented strain on the multilateral system. To promote human rights and protect the essential functions of the UN that hold Member States accountable for their international human rights obligations, the UN must adapt.

The treaty body reporting system is overburdened and in need of reform. This issue is best addressed now through greater operational efficiencies, rather than waiting for a future increase in regular or extra budgetary funding that may not eventuate.

Australia urges relevant Committees and Secretariats to review their processes and apply consistent practices throughout the treaty body system, to make it easier for Member States to understand their requirements and thereby comply with their obligations. Past attempts at treaty body review and reform have resulted in good and concrete proposals that would support this, including measures identified under previous calls for input on Treaty Body Strengthening:

- adoption of the OHCHR's Simplified Reporting Procedure across all treaty bodies,
- standardisation of Committee hearings, reporting periods, and member State appearances to eight years,

- greater uptake of measures to ensure accessibility to facilitate greater engagement and participation, and
- implementation of better working practices and procedural matters.

Coordination and predictability in review cycles and reporting

At last estimate, there were over 500 overdue treaty body reports, and a significant backlog of un-actioned reports. Both treaty body members and Member States are struggling to keep up with reporting requirements. Not all Member States are resourced to produce the reports that require considerable coordination. For example, around 30 agencies from across Australian governments contributed to Australia's sixth Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) report. Australia's hybrid CESCR hearing required attendance by 13 government agencies to respond to the wide range of issues raised. The adoption of simplified reporting procedures across all treaty bodies would help in addressing this burden on Member States. Committees and Secretariats could further streamline processes, provide consistent advice and remain focused on their core mandates.

Greater consistency in, and shorter periods between, reporting periods are also required. Many current schedules are too drawn out – for example, Australia has not appeared before the Committee on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CPRD) since 2019 and is not expected to do so again until 2039. An eight year reporting period would significantly improve the system.

Strengthening the engagement with civil society and other relevant stakeholders

Australia supports and facilitates National Human Rights Institutions and NGO involvement in our treaty body reporting processes. Diverse and dynamic civil society provide vital contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights, peace and security, and sustainable development at home and abroad. Civil society ensures transparency and accountability in human rights treaty body reporting.

Australia conveys our expectation that human rights treaty bodies meetings fully support member, civil society and community engagement. We are concerned by the UN's recent inability to provide essential sign language interpretation services to 34th session of the CPRD (2026). While funding constraints are being felt across the system, we emphasise that these services are mandated to ensure proceedings are accessible to people with disabilities, and we encourage the UN to provide the services at upcoming human rights treaty body meetings, and especially if they relate to persons with disabilities.

Australia reiterates its encouragement to the OHCHR to support hybrid arrangements to enhance the participation of all delegations, particularly small island and developing states, small delegations, and Member States without a presence in Geneva. Access to OHCHR regional offices'

video-conferencing facilities, for example, would be one way to facilitate hybrid facilitation and ensure OHCHR has control over technical requirements.

Good practices and methodologies in relation to working methods and procedural matters, including harmonization and alignment of working methods

Australia reiterates its strong support for the harmonization of working methods across all Committees. It also notes that greater coordination of scheduling will avoid duplication of reporting processes and overlap of appearances before different treaty bodies and the Human Rights Council. Advance notice of reporting deadlines and scheduled appearances provided directly to Member States would similarly facilitate better reporting by allowing for adequate time to coordinate responses.

Australia supports the implementation of strict time limits for appearances, which would improve the focus and quality of questions and answers. Australia welcomes time limits that encourage both the State party and Committee to make the most efficient use of time available and also feel there has been sufficient time and scope to discuss issues in detail and present their perspectives fully.

Australia also supports the use of targeted, clearly-articulated questions that expressly reference relevant articles of the treaty to ensure that the Committee receives the most relevant and appropriate information from Member States. Australia strongly supports the provision of a list of questions to the State party delegation 24 hours prior to the appearance to avoid duplication of questions and to allow Member States the best opportunity to provide detailed and in depth answers.

Australia recognises that efficiencies in the UN, including the treaty body system, can only be achieved by Member States and the UN being disciplined in their approach. We encourage all Member States to monitor processes to ensure the treaty body system remains sustainable and effective for decades to come.

We reiterate our support for treaty body reform and thank you for the chance to participate in this process.

Please accept our assurances of our highest consideration.



Clare Walsh
Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Australia
to the United Nations and to the Conference on Disarmament, Geneva